



Informational Guideline Release

Property Tax Bureau
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CREATION OF MULTIPLE STABILIZATION FUNDS
AND
PROPOSITION 2½ OVERRIDES FOR STABILIZATION FUNDS

**Chapter 46 §§14 and 50 and Chapter 140 §§19 and 137 of the Acts of 2003
(Amending G.L. Ch. 40 §5B and Ch. 59 §21C(g))**

This Informational Guideline Release (IGR) informs local officials about new legislation that allows cities, towns and districts to create multiple stabilization funds for different purposes. The legislation also prohibits cities and towns from using the increased levy capacity resulting from a Proposition 2½ levy limit override approved for the purpose of making appropriations to any of those funds for any other spending purpose in a subsequent year without voter approval

Topical Index Key:

Accounting Policies and Procedures
Appropriations
Proposition 2½
Special Funds

Distribution:

Accountants/ Auditors
Mayors/Selectmen
City/Town Managers/Exec. Secys.
Finance Directors
Finance Committees
City/Town Councils
City Solicitors/Town Counsels

CREATION OF MULTIPLE STABILIZATION FUNDS
AND
PROPOSITION 2½ OVERRIDES FOR STABILIZATION FUNDS

**Chapter 46 §§14 and 50 and Chapter 140 §§19 and 137 of the Acts of 2003
(Amending G.L. Ch. 40 §5B and Ch. 59 §21C(g))**

SUMMARY:

These guidelines explain new legislation that gives cities, towns and districts the flexibility to create multiple stabilization funds for different purposes. The legislation amends G.L. Ch. 40 §5B, which previously provided for a single stabilization fund into which cities, towns and districts could appropriate monies to be reserved for future appropriation for any lawful purpose. Under the amendment, a community may now establish one or more stabilization funds for different purposes by a two-thirds vote of its legislative body. It may amend the purposes of those funds at a later time in the same manner. Appropriations both into and from the funds require a two-thirds vote of the legislative body. Previously, appropriations to the stabilization fund only required a majority vote. Interest earned on all stabilization funds remains with the funds. The interest provision had been inadvertently omitted when the statute was amended, but it was restored by a recent technical amendment and applies retroactively. Ch. 140 §§19 and 137 of the Acts of 2003.

In addition, a new paragraph has been included in G.L. Ch. 59 §21C(g), which authorizes a property tax levy limit override under Proposition 2½. Under this new provision, a city or town that has an override approved by its voters for the purpose of making appropriations to any stabilization fund must now allocate or dedicate the additional levy capacity resulting from that override to the same purpose in subsequent years. Ordinarily, monies from an override are only earmarked for the stated purpose in the fiscal year the override is effective. Two-thirds of the selectmen, town council or city council, with the mayor's approval if required by law, must vote to "appropriate" the additional capacity for the same stabilization fund purpose each year after the override takes effect. If "appropriated," the assessors must raise the amount in the tax rate and the municipality's levy limit is increased accordingly for that year. Voters may approve a change in the purpose for which the additional levy capacity can be used in future years. Approval of any change is by majority vote at a referendum.

These changes became effective July 31, 2003. They apply to any appropriation voted and levy limit override approved for a stabilization fund after that date.

GUIDELINES:

I. MULTIPLE STABILIZATION FUNDS

A. Creation of Funds

Stabilization funds may be created for one or more different purposes. G.L. Ch. 40 §5B. A fund may be created for a broad category of spending purposes, *e.g.*, any lawful purpose, capital budget purposes or purposes for which the community may borrow money. It may also be created for a specific purpose or project, *e.g.*, acquire a new fire truck or undertake a particular school construction project.

Creation of a fund requires a two-thirds vote of the legislative body of the city, town or district. The vote must clearly define the purpose(s) of the fund.

B. Pre-existing Fund

Any pre-existing stabilization fund balance should continue to be treated as a reserve for any lawful purpose, *i.e.* a "general" stabilization fund. The city, town or district can reallocate or earmark all or part of that balance to any new stabilization funds it creates by a vote to transfer monies from that "general" stabilization fund to the newly created fund. See Section I-D below.

C. Changing Fund Purpose

The purpose of a stabilization fund may be changed at any later time by a two-thirds vote of the legislative body. For example, if a community had established a fund in order to reserve monies to acquire a new fire truck and a balance remains after the purchase, the legislative body could vote to change the purpose to meet some new savings objective.

If a Proposition 2½ levy limit override was approved for the purpose of funding the particular stabilization fund, however, the city or town must also follow the referendum procedure explained in Section II-C below to be able to change the fund purpose and then continue using the additional levy capacity resulting from that override in future years.

D. Appropriations and Transfers

Appropriations into and from any stabilization fund require a two-thirds vote of the legislative body.

Monies may also be transferred from one stabilization fund to another by two-thirds vote. If the monies in the fund from which the transfer is made could not be appropriated directly for the purpose of the fund receiving the transfer, *e.g.*, a transfer of \$50,000 from a fund for a particular school construction project to a fund to construct a new senior center, the vote also serves as a change in purpose to the extent of the amount appropriated.

E. Investment and Interest

The treasurer may invest stabilization funds in national, savings or cooperative banks, Massachusetts trust companies, federal savings and loans associations located in Massachusetts or securities that are legal investments for savings banks under Massachusetts law.

All interest earned on the investment of stabilization funds belongs to the funds. The treasurer may pool monies from all stabilization funds for investment purposes, but the accounting officer must account for them separately in the general ledger and allocate interest earned on the pooled monies proportionately to each stabilization fund.

F. Limits on Funds

1. Annual Appropriations

Total annual appropriations to all stabilization funds are limited to 10 percent of the prior year's tax levy. This includes "appropriations" of additional levy capacity resulting from Proposition 2½ overrides approved for the funds. See Section II-B below. The limit on total appropriations may be exceeded with approval of the Director of Accounts.

2. Balance

The total of all stabilization fund balances cannot exceed 10 percent of a community's equalized valuation.

II. STABILIZATION FUND OVERRIDES

A. Presentation and Approval of Override Referendum

Cities and towns may ask voters to approve a Proposition 2½ levy limit override referendum for the purpose of funding any of the stabilization funds it establishes.

If approved, the additional levy capacity is earmarked for the same stabilization fund in the fiscal year the override is effective and subsequent years. G.L. Ch. 59 §21C(g).

Therefore, the amount of any override for a stabilization fund must be clearly identified, preferably by presenting a separate override question for each stabilization fund being funded. For example:

Shall the city/town of _____ be allowed to assess an additional \$100,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the municipal capital stabilization fund for the fiscal year beginning July 1, ____?

Shall the city/town of _____ be allowed to assess an additional \$100,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the school capital stabilization fund for the fiscal year beginning July 1, ____?

If the amount is included in an override for multiple purposes, however, the exact amount allocated to the particular stabilization fund must be stated. For example:

Shall the city/town of _____ be allowed to assess an additional \$1,000,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the town and school operating budgets, the municipal capital stabilization fund (\$100,000) and the school capital stabilization fund (\$100,000) for the fiscal year beginning July 1, ____?

B. Appropriation of Override in Future Years

1. Annual Appropriation Procedure

In the year the override is effective, the appropriation of the funds generated by the override to the particular fund is made by the usual appropriation procedure, *i.e.*, a two-thirds vote of the legislative body.

Each year thereafter, however, the selectmen, town council or city council, with the mayor's approval if required by law, must decide whether to "appropriate" any of the additional capacity resulting from the override for the same stabilization fund purpose. A two-thirds vote is required to make any "appropriation".

2. Appropriation Amount

All or some of the additional levy capacity may be "appropriated." In the first year after the override is effective, the additional levy capacity that may be appropriated is 102.5 percent of the override amount. In subsequent years, it is 102.5 percent of the amount of additional levy capacity appropriated in the last year it was appropriated.

For example, a \$100,000 override is approved for a school capital project stabilization fund for fiscal year 2005 and the legislative body appropriates the same amount from that year's tax levy for that purpose. In FY2006, \$102,500 is available for "appropriation" by the selectmen, town council or city council, with the mayor's approval if required by law. That entire amount is "appropriated." In FY2007, \$105,062 ($1.025 \times \text{FY2006 appropriation of } \$102,500$) is available, but only \$80,000 is "appropriated." The amount available in FY2008 now becomes \$82,000 ($1.025 \times \text{FY2007 appropriation of } \$80,000$). No appropriation is made in FY2008, however. The amount available in FY2009 is \$82,000 ($1.025 \times \text{last appropriation made, i.e., FY2007 appropriation of } \$80,000$).

3. Tax Rate

The assessors must raise the amount "appropriated" in the tax rate. This "appropriation" is reported on page two of the tax rate recapitulation under "Other Amounts to Be Raised" and documented by a certified copy of the "appropriation" vote, as explained in the annual tax rate recapitulation instructions issued by the Bureau of Accounts.

4. Levy Limit Calculation

The municipality's levy limit for any year is increased by the amount of additional levy capacity that is appropriated for the stabilization fund purpose. The new limit must still be within overall levy ceiling of 2½ percent of the full and fair cash value of taxable property.

C. Change in Override Purpose

1. Presenting Referendum

The selectmen, town council or city council, with the mayor's approval if required by law, may ask the voters to approve a change in the purpose of the override. This change can result in the additional levy capacity being allocated to another stabilization fund or to any other municipal purpose. A two-thirds vote is required to place the referendum before the voters.

2. Referendum Form

The following question form should be used to present a referendum to change the override purpose:

Shall the city/town of _____ be allowed to change the purpose of a Proposition 2½ override referendum approved at an election held on _____, ____ for the (capital stabilization fund) to the following new purpose(s): _____ for the fiscal year beginning July 1, ____?

3. Referendum Approval

The referendum is approved if a majority of those voting on the question vote "yes."

4. Appropriation in Future Years

If the purpose of the override is changed to another stabilization fund, or other purpose, the additional levy capacity would have to be "appropriated" to the new purpose each year or the levy limit would be reduced. See Section II-B above.